



How Are Pothole Claims Handled?

City streets have taken a beating these past years. Heavy rains, freezing temperatures, ice and snow have taken their toll. The resulting potholes and defects are usually considered road hazards. They are not due to negligence on the part of the City.

Springfield Development and Public Works (DPW) uses a complaint driven system to address road defects such as potholes. DPW relies on reports from the public to locate road defects. Call the DPW operations division at 541-726-3761 to report potholes. Based on reports from the public, DPW will prioritize needed repairs.

Is it a pothole?

Potholes form when rainwater sinks through cracks in old or weakened asphalt. The water saturates the road's aggregate base. Vehicles passing over the road force fine particles of the roadbed up and out of cracks in the asphalt (called pumping). Loss of fine particles from the aggregate base result in voids. These voids cause the aggregate base and the asphalt layer to sink. As the asphalt sinks it eventually cracks under the continued impact of vehicle tires and chunks come loose.

A **sinkhole** is a hole that reaches past the base of the roadway. Sinkholes are generally larger and deeper than potholes. They are usually caused by a source of water under the pavement, such as a broken pipe. The water causes the soil to wash away, creating a void under the pavement, and eventually the pavement gives away.

Delaminations are formed when the upper asphalt concrete layer becomes detached and breaks apart from the underlying layer. Delaminations, or delams, can appear as very shallow potholes. They are typically not as deep as potholes or sinkholes.

Trenches or utility cuts are a rectangular excavation in the roadway. These cuts are made by utilities and plumbers to reach underground lines. The contractors are responsible for filling the ditch and paving it temporarily, and notifying the City upon completion of their work.

Filing a claim

When a driver files a claim for vehicle damage, City Risk will confer with DPW:

- Is the road defect on a street the City is responsible to maintain?
- Has the road defect been reported?
- Has the road defect been repaired?

If a pothole is on a city maintained street and has been reported, City Risk will check that DPW followed its protocols and timelines to evaluate and repair the pothole. Gathering this information may take several weeks. The city or its' insurer will respond to the claimant on the status of the claim.

Most pothole claims are not paid. Historically, very few claims for potholes are due to City negligence. Widespread damage to streets is caused by inclement weather and other factors beyond the City's control. Drivers have an obligation to be aware of road conditions at all times and adjust their driving behavior accordingly. Claimants are encouraged to contact their own insurer if they need immediate repairs or if their claim has been denied.

- Contact Risk Management or obtain a claim form. 541-726-3705 <http://www.springfield-or.gov/hr/RiskManagement.htm>
- Go to the City's website to learn more about the City's street maintenance program. <http://www.springfield-or.gov/DPW/Streets.htm>